

2004 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC LAW 106-107

Social Security Administration

Participation in the Governmentwide Streamlining and eGrants Efforts

The Social Security Administration (SSA) continued to participate in several grants streamlining initiatives over the past year that improved the effectiveness and performance of grants programs, simplified the grants application and reporting processes, improved the delivery of services to the public, and facilitated greater communication among those responsible for delivering services.

SSA staff continue to participate on several intergovernmental workgroups and committees including:

- ◆ Interagency Electronic Grants Committee. SSA staff attended meetings and provided input on several issues addressed by this committee including the mandatory grants systems, an OMB update, State eGrants systems, tracking Federal funds at the State level and a Grants.gov progress report.
- ◆ Interagency Suspension and Debarment Committee. In addition to attending monthly meetings, SSA underwent the required training for the Excluded Parties Listing System. SSA also reviewed and provided comments on several documents presented to this committee.

Internal Efforts to Create an Environment Conducive to Grants Streamlining and Simplification

General Approach

SSA Grants Electronic Library (SSAGEL)

SSA is currently using SSAGEL for two of its grants programs. SSAGEL is a document management facility that provides for the sharing of electronic grants documents across SSA's wide area network. SSAGEL is used by several components in SSA including the Office of Acquisition and Grants (OAG), multiple program offices and the Office of Finance. Documents housed in SSAGEL come to SSA in electronic format or, upon receipt in paper format, are scanned to create electronic documents. The extent to which SSAGEL continues to prove reliable and beneficial will determine whether its use is expanded to support SSA's entire grants portfolio.

Change in Financial Reporting Requirement

SSA moved forward with its proposal to change financial reporting requirements from quarterly reports to a less frequent period. After conducting a pilot using a select group of awardees to test and evaluate the effects of less frequent reporting on SSA staff and its grant recipients, the reporting requirement was changed from quarterly to semi-annual. However, SSA retains the ability to require more frequent reporting as necessary to monitor high risk grantees.

SSA Grants Streamlining Initiative

OAG continues to include the Grants Process Streamlining Initiative as one of its priorities. SSA continues to review carefully the grant awards process to identify areas that need improvement. OAG staff continue to lead this initiative and work closely with SSA's program components and financial management staff that have key roles in the current process. SSA's objectives are to eliminate redundancies, outdated and unnecessary steps in the process, and to realign the remaining steps, working in conjunction with other initiatives such as eGrants, to achieve a smoother, more efficient process.

SSA Grants Website

The SSA Grants website has been updated to include the SSA codified Federal Grant Regulations, as well as SSA's Grants Administration Manual (GAM) and Grants Policy Handbook. The GAM and Policy Handbook contain the policies and procedures associated with administering the SSA grants program. The Grants website continues to include published information related to present and past grant opportunities.

SSA-Specific Grant Rules

Prior to March 31, 1995, SSA was an operating component of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). As a result of Public Law 103-296, SSA became an independent agency on March 31, 1995. However, pursuant to section 106(b) of that law, the HHS regulations at 45 CFR Part 76 dealing with nonprocurement, debarment and suspension, and the requirements for a drug-free workplace have remained applicable to SSA. In order to implement its own set of regulations on these topics, SSA adopted the common rules on nonprocurement, debarment and suspension, and requirements for a drug-free workplace with one amendment as new Parts 436 and 439 in Title 20 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The Common Rule was published on November 26, 2003, as final rules and HHS regulations at 45 CFR Part 76 are no longer applicable to SSA.

Review and Update of Internal Policies

The OAG staff completed the review and update of its internal policies and guidelines to assure compliance with newly established SSA rules and with governmentwide streamlining initiatives. Specifically, an SSA Grants Administration Manual was established and the SSA Policy Handbook updated. Both have been downloaded onto the SSA's Grants website.

Preparing for the Recent and Coming Changes Affecting the Pre-Award Process

A. FedGrants.govFIND

SSA continues to use the Federal governmentwide website FedGrants.govFIND (FIND), to publish notifications of grant opportunities. It currently publishes 100 percent of its competitive grant and cooperative agreement opportunities on this site. OAG staff furnished guidance to each program component who published grant opportunities this year. Each group was given the new standard data element format so that the program announcements were written in accordance with the new guidelines stated in the Office of Federal Financial Management Policy Letter of October 8, 2003. In addition, each announcement is reviewed prior to posting on FIND. To date four grant opportunities have been posted via the FIND portal. In 2003, SSA posted three grant opportunities-Retirement Research Consortium re-competition, Wyoming Benefits, Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) re-competition, and the Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation, a new program. In 2004, SSA posted the noncompeting continuation for the first round of BPAO awards.

B. The eGrants Portal and Electronic Applications

A separate facet of the Federal eGrants initiative is the Grants.gov website (a web-based alternative for submission of Federal grant applications). SSA's involvement includes providing feedback to the Federal eGrants taskforce in connection with Grants.gov, as well as testing and approving the SSA specific version of the Grants.gov software. SSA is also using Grants.gov to publish application packages used by the grantee community in submitting their grant applications, and to download submitted applications.

C. The Grants.gov Portal for Electronic Applications

SSA eGrants Initiative

The SSA eGrants Market Research team defined system functional requirements and used these requirements to evaluate existing Federal eGrants systems for possible use at SSA. A cost benefit analysis determined that purchasing and modifying an existing Federal eGrants system for use was not a cost-effective alternative. However, SSA has developed a Grants Electronic Library, utilizing

digital scanning and a document management facility, to greatly reduce its dependency on paper. At this juncture, consideration continues to be given to evolving potential solutions to processing requirements, while monitoring the merits of the eGrants system marketplace.

Electronic Approvals

We have begun accepting internal funding authority and approval documents electronically. Before funding grants and cooperative agreements, each program, both competing and noncompeting continuations, were required to be approved at multiple levels within SSA. The manual, hard copy process took an average of 2 to 3 weeks to acquire all necessary signatures. These documents are currently routed through the necessary channels electronically. We receive the documents in about half the normal time. Other benefits include faster distribution to staff and easier storage into the SSAGEL system.

Grants.govAPPLY

SSA began using Grants.govAPPLY in May 2004 with the noncompeting continuation for the first round of BPAO awardees. Forty-three noncompeting applications were received. Some problems with the application submission process did occur, mostly centered around the applicant registration process and agency specific application software glitches, which are being resolved. SSA worked with grantees and the Grants.gov helpdesk to correct problems. The plan is to continue to use this system to receive all new applications for SSA competing and non-competing awards.

Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS)

SSA began implementing the new DUNS requirement with the publication of its Request for Applications for the Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation Program that was announced September 26, 2003. The new requirement, along with specific guidance, was included in the announcement.

Outreach on New Requirements:

Several methods were used to inform and educate grant recipients and other SSA staff regarding the new requirements for use of the DUNS number on all applications, as well as the use of FedGrants.gov to both find and apply for grant opportunities at SSA. The SSA Grants Administration Manual, award letter templates, and outreach presentation materials were first revised to reflect the changes. Currently the SSA Grants Policy Handbook is being revised to reflect the new requirements. Staff meetings and conferences were used as opportunities to present the changes to SSA staff, grantees and prospective applicants of SSA grants and cooperative agreements. Additionally, policy documents are published on the SSA Grants website and available to grantees and SSA staff.